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SUBJECT: SEOUL - PRESS BULLETIN; March 31, 2009

TOP HEADLINES

Chosun Ilbo

Taekwang Industrial Chairman Park Yeon-cha:

"I Will Get Everything off My Chest, Including Matters Involving
Former President Roh"

JoongAng Ilbo

Yangyang International Airport Goes Out of Business

Dong-a Ilbo, Hankook Ilbo

Taekwang Industrial Chairman Park: "I Gave 5 Million Dollars to
Son-in-Law of Roh Geon-pyong, Former President
Roh's Brother, so that He Could Hand the Money over to Former
President Roh"

Hankyoreh Shinmun, All TVs

President Lee Myung-bak Opposes Military Response
to North Korea's Missile Launch

Segye Ilbo, All TVs

President Lee Opposes Military Response to North Korea's Missile
Launch and Rules out
Closing Kaesong Industrial Complex

Seoul Shinmun, All TVs

An ROK Worker Held at Kaesong Industrial Complex
for Allegedly Criticizing North Korea's Political System

DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

President Lee Myung-bak said in a March 30 interview with The
Financial Times that he is opposed to any military response to North
Korea's upcoming rocket launch. (All) This remark is designed to
block Pyongyang's efforts to increase tensions with its missile
launch (Dong-a) and to prevent inter-Korean ties from deteriorating
further. (Hankyoreh) President Lee also said that he will keep the
Kaesong Industrial Complex open for dialogue with North Korea and
that no matter what may happen in the North, it is unimaginable that
the North would be occupied by China. (All)

As President Lee opposes any military response to North Korea's rocket launch and U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates said that the U.S. has no plans shoot down a North Korean missile, the "missile game" is playing out in a way that the North wants. The U.S. is intentionally playing down North Korea's rocket launch for fear that its strong response may encourage Pyongyang further, and the ROKG inevitably needs to fall into step with the U.S. on the North Korean missile issue to avoid any conflicts with the U.S. (Chosun)

The ROK and the U.S. adopted a low-key approach toward the missile issue because the two allies, which have no realistic measures to deter North Korea's missile launch, are now preparing for negotiations after the launch. (Hankook)

The Ministry of Unification said that North Korea is investigating an ROK worker in the North for allegedly criticizing the political system there. (All)

Sohn Kyung-shik, who recently took office as the 20th Chairman of the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said yesterday that the ROK National Assembly should first ratify the ROK-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. (Dong-a, JoongAng, Hankook, Seoul)

President Lee Myung-bak heads to London today for the G-20 summit, where he will discuss measures against the financial crisis and North Korea's missile launch. (All)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland said on March 30 that Pyongyang will consider the ROK's full participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) as a declaration of war. (Dong-a, Hankook, Segye)

U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates said on "Fox News Sunday" on March 29 that he believes that economic penalties against North Korea are more likely than diplomacy to result in progress for U.S. policies toward the North. (Seoul)

MEDIA ANALYSIS

-North Korea

All ROK media gave prominent play to President Lee Myung-bak's March 30 interview with The Financial Times. President Lee Myung-bak said during the interview that he is opposed to any military response to North Korea's upcoming rocket launch, conceding, however, that Japan had every right to protect its citizens. President Lee also said that he will keep the Kaesong Industrial Complex open for dialogue with North Korea and that no matter what may happen in the North, it is unimaginable that the North would be occupied by China.

Conservative Dong-a Ilbo reported in its inside-page story that President Lee's opposition to a military response is designed to block Pyongyang's efforts to increase tensions with its missile launch. Meanwhile, left-leaning Hankyoreh Shinmun reported that President Lee's opposition to a military response is aimed at preventing inter-Korean ties from deteriorating further. Conservative Chosun Ilbo said on its front page that as President Lee opposes any military response to North Korea's rocket launch and Secretary Gates said that the U.S. has no plans to shoot down a North Korean missile, the "missile game" is playing out in a way that the North wants. The daily said that the U.S. is intentionally playing down North Korea's rocket launch for fear that its strong response might encourage Pyongyang further, and the ROKG inevitably needs to fall into step with the U.S. on the North Korean missile issue to prevent any conflicts with Washington.

Moderate Hankook Ilbo reported that the ROK and the U.S. adopted a low-key approach toward the missile issue because the two allies,

who have no realistic measures to deter North Korea's missile launch, are now preparing for negotiations after the launch. The newspaper also speculated that if the North launches a rocket, the UN Security Council will discuss imposing sanctions on the North, but the sanctions will not be strong, and in the end, the North and the U.S. will have high-level talks.

Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo editorialized that the comments by U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates and President Lee reveal close cooperation between the ROK and the U.S., but we can't help harboring considerable concern about (the alliance). The attitude of the U.S., which frequently changes its stance, is not trustworthy. Above all, Secretary Gates will not be able to avoid criticism for his careless remarks on the missile issue... The ROKG should now come up with specific measures to dispel the ROK people's concern. It should even consider participating in the Missile Defense system more positively.

Dong-a Ilbo editorialized: "The irresponsible responses by Seoul and Washington will inevitably cause serious side effects. Military experts warn that President Lee's comment has given the North the green light to launch its Taepodong-2 missile, enabling the North to comfortably make its provocations. The early retreat by Seoul and Washington also makes it difficult for the United Nations to impose strong sanctions on the North if a missile is launched. (We fear that) the toleration of the North's nuclear and missile development will torpedo the Nonproliferation Treaty and the Missile Technology Control Regime."

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Chosun Ilbo editorialized: "Judging from the statements by Secretary of Defense Gates and U.S. Pacific Command Timothy Keating, the U.S. seems to have concluded that even if North Korea fires a missile, it will be difficult to do anything but raise the issue with the UN Security Council. This disappoints a majority of Koreans, who expected the U.S. to prevent North Korea's missile launch through its strong preventive diplomacy or, if a missile is launched, to deal with the North sternly according to international norms. (Washington's attitude) will spread the perception that, 'The U.S. can't help,' not only to the two Koreas but also across the world, and it will also raise doubts and confusion about the Obama Administration's policy direction on North Korea."

Hankyoreh Shinmun's editorial welcomed President Lee's opposition to a military response. The editorial also quoted ROKG officials as saying that through his remarks on opposition to a military response, President Lee sent a message that 'even if the North fires a rocket, the ROK will not take the lead in aggravating the situation.'

Dong-a Ilbo and Hankook Ilbo carried the March 30 statement by North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland that Pyongyang will consider the ROK's full participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) as a declaration of war.

-G-20 Summit

Hankook Ilbo reported that due to differences in the U.S. and European views on a solution to the economic crisis, skepticism runs high over the G-20 summit.

Under the headline, "U.S. President Obama Not Expected to Stick to Stimulus Spending at G-20 Summit," Hankyoreh Shinmun reported that President Obama expressed an intention to make a compromise with Europe, saying during his interview with The Financial Times, "The most important task for all of us is to deliver a strong message of unity in the face of crisis."

-ROK-U.S. Summit

Hankook Ilbo editorialized: "During the summit to be held on the sidelines of the G-20 summit, the ROK and U.S. Presidents should work together to come up with effective measures against North Korea's launch of a long-range rocket... We hope that the first meeting between Presidents Lee and Obama will serve as a golden

opportunity to build mutual trust, which is essential to resolving pending bilateral issues."

-Afghanistan

Under the headline, "The U.S. Passes the Burden of Afghan War to International Community," Hankyoreh Shinmun reported that the U.S. plans to use a series of international conferences to be held in Europe this week as an opportunity to secure assistance from the international community in carrying out Washington's new strategy for Afghanistan. The daily also said that the U.S. is highly likely to ask the ROK to dispatch troops to Afghanistan.

OPINIONS/EDITORIALS

POWER DEFEATING MISSILE
(JoongAng Ilbo, March 31, 2009, Page 47)

By Specialist Mun Chang-geuk

The Six-Party Talks aimed at blocking North Korea from going nuclear have been long stalled, failing to produce any visible outcome. Even though North Korea has been outspoken about its intention to launch a rocket, the ROK's professed position is merely that it has no choice but to resort to dialogue with North Korea after the North's planned rocket launch.

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What went wrong? It seems that the ROK failed to understand the other party. (In general), we embark on talks under the presumption that the other party will be as rational as we are. The U.S. suffered the September 11 terrorist attack because of its failure to realize that al-Qaida could become so irrational. The ROK's sunshine policy or the Six-Party Talks were initiated based on the belief that North Korea is rational.

Negotiations can be made only when both parties are considered rational. The sunshine policy itself is not bad, but effective only under the presumption that the other party is as rational as we are.

I do not think unification will be realized through dialogue with North Korea. What is more urgent than unification is to enlighten North Korean residents. Even when we give a humanitarian helping hand to North Korea, we should make sure that it feels self-respect.

We should make North Koreans realize that they are not destined to be starved and oppressed. What human beings require is freedom, human rights and happiness. Then liberals championing "human reason" should make this point to North Korea but ROK liberals have been mute (with regards) to North Korean.

We should not be swayed by false arguments that we should talk to the North, closing our eyes to the truth of North Korea for fear of war. The ROK should be brave enough to call for human rights and freedom for North Korea. Also, we should thoroughly prepare to defend ourselves against North Korea's provocations. The ROK should increase military costs to build a missile defense system, and also participate in Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

SEOUL SHOULD ENHANCE DIPLOMATIC COORDINATION ON NORTH KOREAN MISSILE ISSUE
(Seoul Shinmun, March 31, 2009, Page 31)

In an interview with the Financial Times, President Lee Myung-bak said he is opposed to a military response to North Korea's rocket launch. President Lee's remarks came after U.S. Secretary of State Robert Gates said on Sunday that Washington has no plans to shoot down the rocket. Earlier, with North Korea announcing its rocket launch, the U.S. and Japan declared that they are poised to intercept a rocket from North Korea. (Regrettably,) this has escalated military tensions on the Korean Peninsula. It seems that President Lee switched to a cautious stance to prevent anxieties

triggered by a military response from hampering the ROK's effort to overcome the economic crisis.

In fact, the ROK has limited options for a military response to North Korea's rocket launch. There is no telling evidence denying North Korea's claim that the launch is a 'satellite' launch. China and Russia have called on the U.S. and Japan to show restraint saying that there is no justification to block North Korea from launching a satellite. Also there is no guarantee that the U.S. will succeed in its attempt to intercept the rocket. Therefore it can be said that it was inevitable that the ROK and the U.S. took a cautious approach.

However, we should not teach North Korea wrongly that provocations will lead to concessions from the ROK and the U.S. The ROK, the U.S. and Japan have disagreed among themselves regarding the North Korea rocket launch. Moreover, their positions are significantly different from those of China and Russia. The ROK should enhance diplomatic efforts not only with the U.S. and Japan but also with China and Russia in order to elicit their cooperation. They should make North Korea realize that a rocket launch and blackmail diplomacy will not be advantageous for the country.

BRIEF BUT SIGNIFICANT ROK-U.S. SUMMIT (Hankook Ilbo, March 31, 2009, Page 35)

President Lee Myung-bak and U.S. President Barack Obama will hold their first summit in London, England where the G20 financial summit

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is to take place on April 2. The ROK-U.S. summit will be brief and informal but carries a significant meaning. The summit is symbolically important because it will be the first bilateral meeting since President Obama took office. It is also important because there are a host of pending issues such as North Korea's imminent rocket launch which require joint responses from both countries.

This ROK-U.S. summit could gauge future bilateral relations between the conservative Lee Myung-bak Government and the liberal Obama Government. In the past, former Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun Administrations and the George W Bush Administration were in conflict due to their differences in North Korea policy. Even though it is said that Presidents Lee and Obama have broadened their mutual understanding through telephone calls, some people are still concerned about the future of bilateral relations. Hopefully, both leaders will build trust and deepen mutual understanding.

Most of all, the two leaders should use their collective wisdom to devise ways to effectively counter North Korea's long-range rocket launch. They should make North Korea pay a price for what it does in defiance of international warnings. Also, they should keep negotiations including the Six-Party Talks on track. In an interview with the Financial Times yesterday, President Lee Myung-bak said that he is opposed to military responses to North Korea's rocket launch. This came after U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said the U.S. has no plans to intercept North Korea's rocket. This shows that both countries have been engaging in prior coordination on this issue. This coordination and shared understanding is likely to lead the two leaders to come up with effective joint responses through the summit.

There are also plenty of pending issues that both countries should resolve through cooperation and coordination, such as expansion of the currency swap, KORUS FTA ratification and the future of the bilateral alliance. The first summit between President Lee and President Obama should serve as a valuable opportunity to foster the mutual trust necessary for solving these issues.

MISSILE MEASURES (JoongAng Ilbo, March 31, 2009, Page 46)

U. S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has made it clear that the U.S. will not try to shoot down the rocket that North Korea plans to

launch. President Lee Myung-bak has also announced his opposition to a military response.

These comments represent a change from the previous positions stated by the ROK and the U.S. Earlier, they pointed out that the road the North is taking goes against UN Security Council Resolution 1718, which prohibits the North from engaging in ballistic missile activity.

It seems President Lee and Gates have reluctantly modified their stance, concluding that the last channels of communication with Pyongyang should not be completely closed even after its launch.

However, although the two countries have adopted a united front about the use of military means to stop the North Korean launch, the interests of the ROK and the U.S. are not necessarily the same.

Gates has dampened talk of a missile launch, saying the North Korean rocket is not a threat since it would not reach U.S. territory.

But howabout the ROK? The security of the ROK depends totally on its alliance with the U.S. Seoul's defense depends on how fast U.S. forces can be committed in the Korean Peninsula from bases in Japan, the Pacific regions and the U.S.

Since North Korea's missiles could strike Hawaii, Guam or even Alaska, it seems they are intended to preemptively block the commitment of U.S. forces to the Korean Peninsula in the event of war.

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North Korea's missiles might not be a direct threat to the U.S., but they are to Seoul.

Clearly, the comments by Gates and President Lee reveal close cooperation between the two countries, but we can't help harboring considerable concern about the Korea-U.S. alliance.

It is not enough to vaguely confirm the Korea-U.S. alliance. Instead, Seoul should talk about how to block hundreds of missiles that the North has targeted at the ROK.

It should discuss whether we can be 100 percent confident that the U.S. will not neglect the security of the ROK, and also look at what measures the two governments are taking against North Korea's weapons of mass destruction.

The ROKG might be forced to accept that it has no choice but to participate in a missile defense program, which has been delayed because of budget problems.

We might also have to consider developing long-range missiles and nuclear weapons, a move that so far has been unnecessary because of our alliance with the U.S.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.)

SEOUL PUSHES `CALM` RESPONSE TO NK MISSILE THREAT
(Dong-a Ilbo, March 31, 2009, Page 31)

A few days remain before North Korea's scheduled testing of a long-range missile (April 4-11), but ROK President Lee Myung-bak is pushing a calm response.

In an interview with the Financial Times yesterday, he said, "I'm against a broader military response to North Korea's missile test." His comment suggests his administration believes responses from other nations to the North's threat are undesirable.

A high-ranking official of the Foreign Affairs and Trade Ministry in Seoul said, "Though the U.S. and Japan said they might shoot down North Korea's rocket to protect the lives and safety of their people from North Korea, many have misunderstood that the two nations will

shoot down the rocket unconditionally."

"President Lee talked about our policy to prevent such a misunderstanding from growing into a crisis."

A spokesman for the North Korean People's Army general staff said March 9 that if Washington or Tokyo tries to intercept the projectile, Pyongyang will also shoot down rockets shot by the two nations.

A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry in Pyongyang said Thursday that even a UN Security Council discussion of a missile launch will rupture the six-way nuclear talks and require strong countermeasures to be taken.

Washington and Seoul, however, have adopted a more moderate response since Pyongyang seeks to raise tension as an excuse to sabotage the six-party talks. A change in the responses of the ROK and U.S. governments was reflected in President Lee's comments, which were made shortly after U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates ruled out U.S. interception of a North Korean rocket.

Nevertheless, Seoul believes it needs to respond if Pyongyang launches a missile. As part of its response, the ROK will officially join the Proliferation Security Initiative, which is designed to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and proactively participate in the Security Council's discussion on imposing sanctions on North Korea.

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ROK Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan implied that a missile launch will incur an international response, saying, "It's impossible to ignore North Korea's violation of the U.N. Security Council's resolution. We just need to talk about the level of penalty."

In his interview with the Financial Times, President Lee said he intends to keep open the Kaesong industrial complex. He also implied, however, that Seoul will impose economic pressure on Pyongyang by saying he needs to rethink additional bilateral cooperation with the North.

Persuading the council to impose sanctions on North Korea will be tough. The ROK thinks it will be difficult to narrow the opinion gap among the five permanent council members since Russia and China oppose a hostile stance against the North.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.)

DOES OBAMA HAVE A N.KOREA POLICY?
(Chosun Ilbo, March 31, 2009, Page 27)

Appearing on Fox News on Sunday, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said the U.S. "was not prepared to do anything about" North Korea's rocket launch, which is expected to take place in the coming days. Gates' latest comments differ from what he said on Feb. 10, that the U.S. could intercept North Korea's missile "if necessary." On Mar. 19, Admiral Timothy Keating, commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, said the U.S. is "fully prepared" to shoot down the missile and added that the U.S. military has the capability to do it.

Judging from the situation so far, the U.S. administration appears to have decided it would be difficult to take any measures against a North Korean missile launch other than discussing it with the UN Security Council. And the Security Council is unlikely to impose new sanctions on North Korea, so the most plausible outcome could be a low-level censure, such as a declaration by the country which holds the presidency of the (Security) Council criticizing the launch.

This would be very disappointing for a large number of ROK people who had hoped the U.S. administration would either prevent the satellite launch by engaging in strong diplomatic efforts, or be followed by a concerted international move demonstrating the resolve

not to condone such acts.

This would spread the view among both North and South Koreans, as well as the international community, that the U.S. has no magic formula either. Fundamentally, it would exacerbate confusion and suspicions over the Obama Administration's North Korea policy.

After meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in Washington on Mar. 11, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the ultimate goal was to get rid of North Korea's nuclear program and added that the U.S. had many options to deal with a North Korean missile launch. Clinton said efforts would still be made to resume the Six-Party Talks, which have been stalled since October 2007.

But the U.S. Defense Department appears to have a different view. Gates said Sunday the Six-Party Talks had made no progress and that this was a source of significant concern. He also voiced skepticism about a purely diplomatic solution, saying he believes the success rate is higher when economic sanctions are used, whether they target North Korea or Iran.

As demonstrated by those contrasting comments, the broad framework of North Korea policy within the Obama Administration has yet to be formulated clearly. The basic direction, a consultation system for North Korea affairs within the administration and a cooperative network with Congress, all remain unclear, while the State Department has yet to appoint an Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs. This is all happening while the Obama Administration reviews North Korea policy.

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As if it were catching the Obama Administration off its guard, North Korea is seeking to up the ante by staging the so-called satellite launch, which is a ploy, according to Secretary Gates, to develop an inter-continental ballistic missile. With no significant leverage at its disposal, the ROK is simply sitting by with its eyes fixed on Washington.

This helplessness cannot continue indefinitely. Seoul and Washington need to hurry up and produce a set of basic principles and at least a rough blueprint of how they intend to deal with North Korea over next four years. If there is not enough time to do this at the April 2 summit in London, they need to set up another meeting as soon as possible. If they fail to do this, there will be no end to North Korea's antics.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.)

PRESIDENT'S REALISTIC REMARKS ON N. KOREAN AFFAIR
(Hankyoreh Shinmun, March 31, 2009, Page 27)

Yesterday, President Lee Myung-bak made notable comments regarding North Korea's planned launch of a "satellite." In an interview with the British business daily Financial Times, in advance of the Group of Twenty (G-20) summit of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors of industrialized and emerging economies on April 2 in London, Lee said, "I oppose any military counteraction against North Korea's test-firing of a missile." In addition, Lee indicated that closing an inter-Korean industrial complex in the border city of Kaesong as a retaliatory step against the North's provocative actions would not necessarily be helpful, saying, "The Kaesong industrial complex is one conduit for us to keep that window of dialogue open." Lee added his administration "has always been open and ready to have dialogue with North Korean. When it comes to humanitarian aid, regardless of other factors, it has always been our consistent position that we are ready and willing with such assistance."

Other than articulating opposition to a military response to North Korea's impending rocket launch, the remarks by Lee were roughly similar to those of other ROKG officials. However, the statements from this interview are meaningful as the President publicly opposed a military response and reaffirmed a moderate stance. Regarding the

intention of Lee's remarks, government officials have explained that, "It sent a message to North Korea that the ROKG won't participate in playing a leading hard-line role to worsen the situation even if North Korea launches a satellite rocket." Given concerns that a satellite launch by North Korea would spark a chain reaction and worsen situations further on the Korean Peninsula, we welcomed this message.

Behind the reason why Lee demonstrates such a stance at this point, there may lie the reality that any sanctions against North Korea would prove ineffective without China and Russia's support. In addition, going into the April 2 summit with U.S. President Barack Obama, the two sides seem to want to make coordinated gestures towards North Korea. While taking both hard and soft lines, the U.S. is putting more of its weight on dialogue with North Korea to resolve matters, as indicated by a remark by Stephen Bosworth, the U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy, who said he wants to meet with North Korean leader (National Defense Commission Chairman) Kim Jong-il. There is also concern that deteriorating inter-Korean relations could further create an economic burden during this time of ongoing global economic crisis, precipitating the "Korean Discount" effect.

The ROKG's role in issues surrounding the Korean Peninsula is key because its national interests are directly at stake, especially at a time when the U.S. has not yet completed its review on its North Korean policy. After North Korea test-fires their missile, the government of President Lee Myung-bak should consider all ways to prevent the situation from worsening and engage North Korea in

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constructive dialogue. Moreover, the government's words should match their actions.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is identical to the Korean version.)

FEATURES

DON'T DELAY ON THE DEAL
(JoongAng Ilbo, March 31, 2009, Page 45)

By Choi Byung-il, Dean of the Graduate School of International Studies at Ewha Womans University

Ratifying the ROK-U.S. free trade deal first will declare that discussion on it has come to an end.

A column that the lawyer Sukhan Kim wrote ("Go slow to secure FTA," March 25) seemed to deliver only the U.S.' arguments. It ignored the basic fact that international negotiations are conducted in connection with a sovereign country's domestic political and economic situation. In his column, Kim opposed the quick ratification of the ROK-U.S. free trade agreement, arguing that it would do more damage to our country than good. He also maintained that considering the state of affairs in the U.S., the clauses about the auto industry must be revised.

If I may first make one conclusion, if Seoul approves the trade deal before Washington does, it will not be the result of a lack of strategy. This runs counter to a remark by an influential member of the ruling party, who said the ROK's National Assembly does what it has to do regardless of what Washington does. The move is aimed at resolving issues Washington has with the portion of the deal that concerns the car industry through creative negotiation tools, rather than renegotiation. This would also secure ground from which the U.S. administration can manage complaints from its domestic car industry.

Although the U.S. is expressing discontent about the parts of the free trade deal focused on the auto sector, there is not a single authority who has officially proclaimed to the ROK that that particular portion has problems and must be negotiated again. Politicians make populist remarks, as they are concerned about the voters in the car industry. But Washington knows that demanding

renegotiation over a free trade agreement that has already been signed is like opening Pandora 's Box.

Kim argued that if the ROK approves the deal first, it would limit our flexibility. But a wise strategist knows that sometimes he needs to restrict his own flexibility in order to get what he wants.

There are three main benefits that the ROK can obtain by ratifying the agreement first.

First, the act will demonstrate the view shared by global leaders - that in order to overcome the first global economic crisis of the 21st century, we must not resort to trade protectionism.

Second, the approval of the ROK-U.S. free trade deal will declare to groups who are still trying to damage the agreement for their own ends that discussion on it has come to an end. As a result, the administration will be able to focus on other important state affairs.

Third, the ROK's approval will make it difficult for the U.S. to demand a renegotiation over the car industry. That is, the ROK will take the upper hand.

Let's think about what will possibly happen if we postpone approving the trade agreement, as Kim argued we should. If the ROK does not approve the pact while the U.S. expresses complaints about the car industry, the U.S. will judge that the ROK also wants to

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renegotiate. This will invite the U.S. to seek renegotiation.

Kim must understand why the ROK does not want to deal with the car issue again. If Washington asks to reopen that section of the deal, the ROK will try to put another issue on the agenda in an attempt to maintain balance.

In the process, discussions over the new item will once again heat up in the ROK. The controversy will hinder the workings of the ROK administration, which already has its hands full. It will serve as a tool for more political fights. Anti-American forces are ready to light candles again and take to the streets at any moment.

Postponing the deal's approval offers no benefits for the ROK. The U.S. must know what possible effects would stem from insisting on renegotiation.

Kim said the U.S. accepted our request to change the results of negotiations in April last year that ended up fully opening our beef market to the U.S. Now it is the ROK's turn to accept changes in the U.S.' political reality and revise the section about the auto industry.

But the beef import negotiations had only one item on the agenda. The results of those talks faced massive protests by the people, whether they were based on scientific facts or not. In the ROK-U.S. free trade agreement, the car industry was only one of many items on the agenda. Kim seems to have forgotten that in the U.S. some groups are dissatisfied with the auto portion of the deal, but others support the free trade agreement.

We should remember that if the U.S. wants to have more talks over the automobile provisions and the ROK strongly resists, (thereby) jeopardizing the whole deal, supporters of the deal in the U.S. would not just sit back and watch.

As the ROK's strategists have already understood, there is no reason to resolve the U.S.' discontent through renegotiation over the car industry. There are other creative compromises to make.

What's important is that the new American administration and Congress share the same understanding. As such, it won't be wise for the ROK's National Assembly to delay ratification of the deal.

(This is a translation provided by the newspaper, and it is

identical to the Korean version.)

PRESIDENT LEE "OPPOSES MILITARY RESPONSE TO NORTH KOREA'S MISSILE LAUNCH;" WHY DO THE ROK AND THE U.S. SUDDENLY ADOPT LOW-KEY ATTITUDE?

(Hankook Ilbo, March 31, 2009, Front Page)

By Reporter Chung Sung-won

President Lee Myung-bak said in a March 30 interview with The Financial Times of the U.K., "I am opposed to a military response to North Korea's missile launch." Prior to this, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates also said in a March 29 interview with Fox News that as of now, he was not considering shooting down a North Korean rocket.

With North Korea's firing of a long-range rocket imminent, the ROK and the U.S. seem to be getting softer in their rhetoric. Since there are no realistically appropriate measures to prevent the launch, this move can be seen as both nations' efforts to prepare for negotiations following the launch.

Of course, both the ROK and the U.S. are basically opposed to North Korea's rocket launch. President Lee said during the interview, "Although (North Korea) argues that it is a space projectile, all nations around the world, including China and Russia, are opposing it because it could be a ballistic missile." The U.S. is reacting more sensitively because Pyongyang's rocket launch indicates that

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(North Korea has) completed its nuclear development program by developing a long-range delivery system, and it also sets a bad example regarding the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

However, the ROK and the U.S. are not bringing up the issue of imposing sanctions on the North as easily as they did in the past. Instead, they are using roundabout expressions, such as "A unified response is needed (The ROK's Chief Delegate to the Six-Party Talks Wi Sung-lac on March 28)." President Lee also noted, "Taking a harder stance would not necessarily be helpful," adding, "Therefore, we will not resort to excessive measures, such as closing the Kaesong Industrial Complex."

This low-key attitude by Seoul and Washington is attributable to the lack of realistic measures to deter North Korea's missile launch. Unlike when the North fired a long-range missile in 1998 and 2006, the communist state is now removing the "seeds of controversy" by notifying international organizations of its planned launch. Another major factor is the lukewarm stance of China and Russia, permanent members of the UN Security Council, toward sanctions on the North.

Therefore, if the North fires a rocket, the situation will likely develop this way: "discussions about sanctions at the UN Security Council" --> "pursuit of passive sanctions, such as the Chairman's Statement" --> (and finally,) "high-level talks between the North and the U.S." In this context, the U.S. stated that it wants to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il (U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy Stephen Bosworth on March 28).

However, in this situation, the ROKG keeps saying that the ROK may consider participating in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) if North Korea launches a long-range missile. An expert observes that the ROK has lost its leverage such as food and fertilizer assistance to the North because of its insistence on taking a hard-line policy on North Korea. The expert notes that this seems to increase the chance that the ROK will be isolated since the U.S and North Korea will likely have direct talks.

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